



Teach Us to Pray

Available April 17, 2018

\$15, 112 pages, paperback

978-0-8308-4521-7

“Gordon Smith keeps doing this – saying deep things with beautiful clarity and breathtaking simplicity. In this book, he does it again. Smith covers ground we thought we knew well, prayer, of all things, but shows us things we missed, forgot, or just plain got wrong. Maybe, though, his greatest gift in these pages is that he doesn’t just teach us about prayer, he inspires us to storm the heavens.”

—Mark Buchanan, author of
Your Church Is Too Safe

“Prayer and the Kingdom of God”

Prayer has a formative impact on our lives – the manner or form of our prayers actually shapes the contours and character of our lives. So frequently, it would seem, our prayers begin with our experience: something in our lives occasions a particular prayer, typically a petition or request. And thus the content of our prayers is determined by what is happening in our lives.

But perhaps the reverse should actually be the norm. Without doubt, the circumstances of our lives will inform our prayers. But perhaps what should be happening is that our prayers would inform our lives, that our praying would alter our living, that our prayers would shape the contours and content of our daily experience.

In this way of living and praying, we would allow our deepest convictions – our faith and our theological vision of God, ourselves, and our world – to inform our prayers and be the *means* by which we know the transforming power of grace in our lives. More particularly, we would choose that the reign of Christ – the kingdom of God – would increasingly be that which defines our lives, our ways of being, living, and responding to our world. We would find that the salvation of God is not merely something that God has done *for* us – in Christ, on the cross – but also something that God is doing *in* us.

To this end our prayers play a crucial role. Indeed, if transformation does not happen through our prayers, it likely does not happen. This is why it is so crucial that we teach new Christians how to pray and that in our patterns and approaches to congregational life we are consistently coming back to the fundamentals of prayer. And this is why all of us, older and newer Christians alike, are always coming back to the basics of the form and structure of formative prayer.

When we pray “thy kingdom come,” should not our prayer be an act of recalibration? Could our praying be an act of intentional alignment and realignment? That is, in our prayer our vision of the kingdom purposes of God will be deepened and broadened; we will be drawn into the reality of Christ risen and now on the throne of the universe. And thus through our prayers we not only pray for the kingdom but come to increasingly live within the kingdom, under the reign of Christ.

This last point is crucial. So frequently we pray as though God is passive and we are trying to get God to act. But could it be that God is always active? And that in our praying we are aware of how God is actually always at work, bringing his kingdom into effect, and we are seeing and responding to the kingdom even as we pray “your kingdom come”? In the process, we are increasingly more aligned and in tune with the kingdom, more and more living our lives, individually and in community, in a manner that consistently reflects, in word and deed, the coming kingdom of God.

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Can we do this? Certainly, but only if we are intentional. We need to consider the merits of a very focused and purposeful approach to our prayers. Yes, there is a place for spontaneity. And most certainly there is a place for free-form prayers where we express to God our immediate thoughts and feelings. But when we speak of our formation in Christ and our participation in the kingdom – where the kingdom of God increasingly defines us more than anything else – we should perhaps be focused and purposeful. We can consider the value of consistency and even routine, an approach to prayer that has an order to it. We can even speak of a liturgy, meaning that our prayers have a regular pattern to them so that over time our hearts and minds and lives are increasing conformed to the very thing for which we are praying.

We are not merely observers; we are engaged. We are invited – more, actually *called* as agents of God’s purposes in the world. Our words *and* our deeds matter. In some mysterious way, even though God and God alone brings about the kingdom, our lives witness to the kingdom – our words, our work. And so when we pray “thy kingdom come,” we also necessarily must pray, *How, oh Lord, are you calling me to make a difference in your kingdom purposes for our world?*

– Adapted from chapter one, “Prayer and the Kingdom of God”